

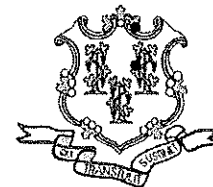


**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Public Hearing Testimony

Judiciary Committee

March 20, 2017



**S.B. No. 1025 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CLOSURE OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE TRAINING SCHOOL
AND THE TRANSFER OF JUVENILE JUSTICE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO THE JUDICIAL BRANCH**

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) **opposes** S.B. No. 1025, An Act Concerning the Closure of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School and the Transfer of Juvenile Justice Programs and Services from the Department of Children and Families to the Judicial Branch.

The Department has significant concerns regarding both the major elements of this legislation: the imposition of statutory provisions related to the closure of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS); and, the proposed transfer of those juvenile justices programs and services currently performed by DCF to the Judicial Branch. Regarding the closure of CJTS, we believe that it is premature to enact legislation prior to the identification of specific alternatives to deal with those youth in need of secure treatment. In response to the proposed transfer of the portion of the juvenile justice population that DCF serves to the Judicial Branch's oversight, the Department believes that the current bifurcated juvenile justice system allows DCF to serve the most challenging youth, who are committed delinquent to DCF by the juvenile courts, with a full array of secure and community based resources that can be adjusted on an individual based on the clinical and therapeutic needs of that youth. This is not to say that there are not challenges in this system, and there is always room for improvement.

The Connecticut Juvenile Training School is a secure facility for young men who have been committed delinquent and placed in the custody of the Department of Children and Families. The facility opened in 2001 with a maximum capacity of over 230 residents. In the spring and summer of 2016, due to a decreasing number of youth committed delinquent and to policy changes within DCF, the average daily population at CJTS was 45 youth.

There is a growing national consensus that large training schools do not achieve the best outcomes for committed delinquent youth. In keeping with this national consensus, in December 2015, Governor Malloy announced his plan to close CJTS by July 2018. In order to effectuate the closure of CJTS, DCF embarked on an inclusive planning process to close or modify the facility in accordance with the Governor's directive in a manner that accounts for the best interests of the youth served by CJTS. The plan is informed by national best practices, as well as an analysis of the population of youth currently served by CJTS and the youth who will be impacted by future age related statutory changes.

Within the next few weeks, DCF will be issuing a Request for Information (RFI) seeking response from the provider community for specific programming alternatives. Through this RFI, the

Department seeks input on the replacement of some or all of the secure capacity at CJTS through the development of small, privately-run secure and semi-secure settings in locations across Connecticut. The Department recognizes the importance of serving all young people in the least restrictive setting possible. When that is not an option due to a youth's needs or high risk profile, a secure congregate care setting is pursued for a defined and brief period of time. The goals of developing privately run settings include the following:

1. Serve young people in the juvenile justice system near their communities of origin;
2. Develop culturally and linguistically responsive, therapeutic programs to serve high-risk youth and ensure their safe and timely return to the community;
3. Implement programming that eliminates the use of restraints;
4. Ensure family engagement in all aspects of the treatment process while youth are in secure care and as they transition into communities;
5. Use best-practices and evidence-based interventions that have been shown to reduce juvenile recidivism and improve long-term outcomes; and
6. Achieve measurable reductions in the rate of re-arrests, re-adjudications, and commitments (or recommitments) to DCF.

The framework for closure of CJTS is informed by national best practices and consultation the Department of Children and Families has received from national juvenile justice experts. In addition to input from national experts, DCF also conducted over 20 focus groups and community meetings with nearly 300 stakeholders across Connecticut.

Many of the recommendations in the CJTS closure plan can be implemented with no-cost or low-cost to the state. In the short-term, the focus should be on implementing these no-cost or low-cost changes to policies and practices that will promote better treatment planning, supervision and services for youth. In the longer-term, the secure bed capacity at CJTS must be replaced with a facility or facilities that operate based on best practice principles.

The Department of Children and Families has a combination of community-based and placement services to meet the needs of youth who are committed delinquent. On average, there are 250 youth committed delinquent to DCF on any given day. Of these, approximately 45% are at home under DCF supervision and receiving community-based services, 44% are in DCF placement and 11% are incarcerated or detained for new crimes committed after their delinquency commitment.

Based on an analysis of existing data, DCF estimates a future facility or facilities should have the capacity for 35 to 50 youth with the flexibility to downsize if the population continues to decrease based on the successful implementation of other recommendations of the plan. Population projections will need to be updated on a quarterly basis to account for the implementation activities and any future changes in the system, such as the impact of the restrictions on the use of pre-trial detention or raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to age 20.

The Department thanks the Committee for consideration of this testimony.

CJTS Monthly Census

